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EU officials in Washington seeking answers on CIA flights and prisons

WASHINGTON - US officials on Tuesday were to begin briefing a delegation of European parliamentarians seeking answers to charges the CIA secretly flew thousands of prisoners through Europe to countries where they might face torture. The 13-member delegation headed by Portuguese Socialist MEP Carlos Coelho is to meet with representatives of the US Administration, members of Congress and various experts during their weeklong stay in Washington. US officials have dismissed reports that the flights carried suspects in the "war on terror" who were being taken to countries where they may be tortured. They have urged European officials to speak out on the issue and said that the great majority of the flights questioned were not carrying terrorist suspects.

Analysts in Washington said they expected little to come out of the meetings between the EU delegation and US officials and added that it was in the best interest of European governments concerned and Washington to hush up the issue that has soured relations. *"One gets the sense that at the level of national governments and trans-Atlantic dialogue, it's in no one's interest to air the dirty laundry,"* said **Charles Kupchan**, a professor of international affairs at Georgetown University in Washington. *"It would not only cause new trans-Atlantic tensions but governments that did knowingly or unknowingly cooperate would be in big trouble."*

Kupchan and other analysts said they believe the delegation's visit to Washington was aimed, in part, at responding to public outrage in Europe over the secret flights and allegations of torture at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere. Members of the European Parliament have also expressed frustration at the lack of oversight in this area at the EU level. *"This is an area in which national European governments don't want to see the European Parliament play a role,"* said **Robin Niblett**, the director of the Europe program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. *"I think this issue will continue to eat away and corrode the popular image of America within the European publics,"* Niblett said. *"But I don't think it's going to go beyond that."* (AFP, 5/9)

EU lawmakers seek information from U.S. officials on detainees

WASHINGTON - A group of European Union lawmakers Tuesday sought to shed light on allegations about secret CIA prisons and flights for terror suspects in Europe, meeting with U.S. officials, lawmakers and human rights groups. The deputy chairman of the 13-member group, German deputy **Cem Ozdemir**, said the purpose of the Washington trip is not to question activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, but to determine the involvement of European countries. *"We want to find out more about accusations that it is very likely secret prisons existed in Poland and Romania, but so far the smoking gun is not there,"* he said at the start of a meeting with two American lawyers specializing in international law and human rights.

Another member of the delegation, British deputy **Jean Lambert**, said the purpose of the trip *"is basically fact-finding. We'd like to get some clear answers on the involvement of European governments"* in the alleged prisons and overflights. **Sarah Ludford**, the deputy chairwoman, said that while the deputies wanted *"to explore the past and get as much information as possible, we also want to try to develop a common understanding of what to do in the future"* to encourage investigation of clandestine activities by both European and American lawmakers.

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During their four-day stay, the delegation is scheduled to meet with Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Daniel Fried, former CIA director James Woolsey and three members of Congress. They also will meet with John Bellinger and with lawyers and nongovernmental organizations. Bellinger saw members of the group in Belgium last week. (AP, 5/)

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